

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

The Rayen School

Personal Experience

O. H. 1087

KENNETH H. PICKERING

Interviewed

by

Mark Connelly

on

October 21, 1974

YOUNGSTOWN STATE UNIVERSITY

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: KENNETH H. PICKERING

INTERVIEWER: Mark Connelly

SUBJECT: Rayen School; students; faculty; administration

DATE: October 21, 1974

C: This is an interview with Kenneth H. Pickering for the Youngstown State University Oral History Program, on Rayen School, by Mark Connelly, on October 21, 1974, at 2115 Elm Street, at 11:00 p.m.

Mr. Pickering, would you please talk a little bit about your educational background?

P: I graduated from Ohio University in 1917. The university is located at Athens, Ohio. There I received a degree of bachelor of science in education. That was the year that we went to war, 1917. I belonged to the National Guard. We were federalized and I spent ten months in Montgomery, Alabama. Then we left for France, where we spent another ten months.

And on returning, I couldn't find a job teaching, so I went to Akron where I worked with Whitman Barnes Manufacturing Company, inspecting grills. My father and my mother got me a job teaching at Summerfield, Ohio. There I coached track. My boys came in second in the county meet. My girls won the county meet by twenty points. That was the only track meet we had that year on account of the flu. So I returned to Athens after the track meet and Dean Richardson, who was head of the Department of Education, at Ohio University, got me a job coaching at Campbell, Ohio. There my teams, my football teams lost two games in two seasons. My basketball team lost three games in six seasons. We were

runner-up in the district one year. This was from 1920 to 1927. And then I went to Rayen in 1927. First semester of 1927.

C: How did you go about getting the job at Rayen?

P: At Rayen, I got the job through Dean Richardson again. He had then become Superintendent of Schools of Youngstown.

I started at Rayen, as all new teachers do, teaching several subjects: Civics, World History, and then I had the golf team, which I have a record here. In which I coached twenty-nine years. I had nine undefeated seasons. I went two to the city championships and nine district championships. Was runner-up in the state once and placed third in the state three other times.

C: What years would that be through?

P: That would be from 1928 to 1955.

C: When did you start just teaching American History there?

P: I would think about 1940.

C: 1940. So for thirteen years, you taught a number of subjects then?

P: Yes.

C: Would you say that a teacher was considered firmly established once he was down to one subject?

P: I think so, yes.

C: Sort of like the thing that signalled. . .

P: Yes. Other teachers had come in by that time and I was you might say, promoting to American History.

C: Okay. Fine. Now, what about your job there? For example, the hours worked. Like, what time would the day start and what time would the day end for you as a teacher? And please sir, distinguish between time periods. Like say in the 1920's as compared to the 1950's.

P: Well, a teacher, at that time, was required to be in the building at 8:15.

- C: That would be in about the 1920's, around that.
- P: And then we taught until 3:30. I stayed longer because I scouted football for Lansing. And I had to go out after school and give the scrub team the plays. I had to give it to Johnny Ross, who was then scrub coach. And on Saturday, I would scout the coming opponent.
- C: What about your teaching? Was teaching, at that time done mostly from, say, straight from the textbooks or did you have to do their things besides, as far as, you know, when you prepare your classes for the day?
- P: It was generally done straight from the textbooks, but I developed my own system of teaching, in which I used pupils to act as sort of monitors and teachers. And I had quite a bit of time on current events, which I had divided into different sections; the sports and local history, national history and world events. Each one had a committee chairman and his own committee. They would prepare that and they would last all week and have those departments. I wrote that in first and then I would come to the history part of the American History part of it, and had a little talk, explain anything of the lesson and asked the questions on the lessons. A short test, a true and false test and that was it.
- C: About when did you initiate this sort of . . . ?
- P: About 1945, I would say.
- C: And then you continued it on until your retirement?
- P: Time be known, and I sent this to the Northwest Teacher's Association and it was published in their magazine, this plan of attack.
- C: Do you know of any other teachers in the Rayen School who used this sort of method?
- P: No, no one did. All used straight lecture.
- C: From the text, basically?
- P: Yes.
- C: Where would you sort of place yourself say on the spectrum, you know, the educational spectrum, at the Rayen School? For example, how many other people. . . ?

- P: Just about here.
- C: What about, for example, in relation to other teachers? Like how many other teachers there had the college degrees as opposed to say a two year teaching certificate when you started and when you finished?
- P: I think that there were several working on their degrees. I don't remember just who they were.
- C: What time period would this be?
- P: I'd say that was up to 1942 or 1943.
- C: Up until 1942 or 1943, then, there were teachers still working on their A.B. degrees?
- P: I think so.
- C: Okay. But that was not the rule.
- P: That was not the rule, no. That was the exception.
- C: Now, what about, as say, opposed to the other schools within the city? Would you say there were more or less?
- P: Less.
- C: As far as being less teachers within the city who did not have their degrees than the Rayen School?
- P: No, there would be more of them in the city. There were less at Rayen.
- C: Okay, less at Rayen. You mentioned, though, that you scouted football. How long did you scout football?
- P: As long as Lansing Phillips taught. Can't just remember the years. Bevins was there, when I went up there, Wally Bevins, and he left after about two years, I would say. So Lansing had it I think about seven years. And then Gerald Horne came in. I enjoyed it very much because I had coached football in Campbell. And Lansing, he beat South every year except the first year he was up there.
- C: What I'd like to do now is sort of like draw a comparison and contrast. Say between a typical day at Rayen in 1927 as opposed to a typical day in 1960 or 1959. Say when you started as opposed to when you were leaving. Like would you sight some changes?

P: I think that the teachers would have probably stayed longer at Rayen to work the children after school in that at first than when I left.

I think there was more individual attention to the students than there is at the present time from what I hear, and this is only hearsay.

It seems to me that there is not quite that intimacy, that intimacy that prevails today. That is, they didn't call us by our first names and everything was more respectful and more dignified, if I may put it that way.

C: What about, for example, was there like a special code of ethics for the teacher at Rayen?

P: Yes. I think so.

C: Would you describe it?

P: I think that we had this custom, I don't know if it was obligatory, but it was customary, that we should always wear our coats and a tie and dress in that sort of way. That we should be addressed as Mister or Miss. That we should address them even if we wanted to as "Mr. So and So" and "Miss So and So," That is, a student. And there's not that freedom of speech between the pupil and the teacher. I mean it's too intimate, not that too intimate thing.

The discipline was very good in those days. I never had any trouble with the children. Tell them to do something and they would do it. I think that there was a general respect for Rayen School, which comes from their parents, many of whom had gone to Rayen, most of them had gone to Rayen. And there was that prevailing respect for the discipline, so it was not the problem that it is today.

C: Did you notice a definite change in that, say in about 1958, when you were leaving?

P: Yes. It started about that time. Not to me. I never had it.

C: But you noticed it. Like what would be the changes?

P: Yes. Well, I think that they chummed around too much with the students and seemed to consider that they're on the same level. Everybody's calling each other by their

first names and things of that nature that we didn't have.

C: Did you notice the effect it had on the quality of education at Rayen at this time?

P: Yes. I think it was beginning then to lose the quality that it had had during our regime.

C: This would be the late 1950's that you noticed this.

P: Yes, the late 1950's.

C: What about the ethics that the Rayen School teacher had to live by, as far as. . .

P: There was no set rules written there, but everyone seemed to know that they should come dressed properly, with tie and jacket, and that they should maintain a certain distance between the pupils and the teacher. Things like that were taken for granted at Rayen and yet I never heard them mentioned anywhere else nor never saw them done anywhere else.

C: Like say when you were teaching at Campbell, did they, was it like that at Campbell, when you were there?

P: I would say it was a good deal like that because those children out there, being mostly foreign, had a great respect for the teachers and that had come down through their parents and quite a few had come from the old world, back at that time. And they had an innate sense of equality of a teacher. And he demanded and was accorded respect on account of his position. And you can sense that's one of the first things I sensed when I went out to Campbell, that respect and deference that they paid the teachers.

C: What about at Rayen? Were there many foreign students at Rayen?

P: No, not very many at that time. Most of them came from Briar Hill and there were not very many. Briar Hill's been built up since then. Back in 1927, there were not very many students from Briar Hill and constituted mostly the foreign element of this area at that time.

C: Where did most of those students go?

P: Most foreign students, or so-called foreign students,

or so-called foreign students, had the same opinion that they did in Campbell. They were very respectful. It is always true that teachers would be grading on respect.

C: Did very many of them go to high school, say the ones from Briar Hill?

P: Quite a few, yes. Some did drop out and go into the mills.

C: Where would most of them have gone, if they went? Where would most of the foreign students, people of foreign descent, go to school, high school, the ones from Briar Hill?

P: They would go to Rayen. Yes.

C: So really not that many went to school.

P: Well, I would say that most of them went to school.

C: What about, for example, say, this code of ethics or whatever it was, unwritten? Was there a distinction between what a man teacher was supposed to do as opposed to what a woman teacher was supposed to do or act? For example, I don't think women were allowed to be married and teach at the Rayen School, were they?

P: No. Not in the beginning. There were some distinctions and there are some things that they couldn't do that the ladies couldn't do. They couldn't go to the games, for instance, and take tickets and sell tickets. And they did not do much hall duty. And of course, at that time, you didn't have a cafeteria and you were supervised in the halls, those that did anything for them. That's all of the distinction that I can make at the time that I can think of.

C: What about say the pay scale? Would a lady be paid less than a man for doing the same?

P: No, I don't think so.

C: There was no discrepancy in payments?

P: No, I don't think so. Except that we got a little money for taking tickets at the games. Of course, they didn't

do that, but outside of that, I don't think of anything.

C: Did they ever complain about not having as many rights as the men?

P: No. Never heard of that. They enjoyed being ladies. Like the song, "I'm glad that I'm a girl."

C: Now would you say that the overall quality of education sort of like went downhill at Rayen after a certain period?

P: I would say so from hearsay. I haven't supervised any classes nor heard it directly from the principal nor the teachers who remained after I left, but I have heard it from people. This is all hearsay around in this area who have students, have children who are students.

C: But you didn't notice it while you were there?

P: In the case of some teachers, I did and of course that applies generally. There are good teachers and poor teachers in any school system.

C: Now, when you came in, it would be 1927, right?

P: Yes, the first semester of 1927 and 1928.

C: Okay. Now there was sort of like a struggle going on between the board of education and the trustees as far as the control of the high school, around that time. Did you notice that?

P: I knew of it, but I didn't notice too much.

C: So it really had no effect.

P: It had no effect on me, no, because I was so busy.

C: But there was, so even after the board of education gained almost total control of the high school, did you notice any changes being made?

P: No, I can't say that I did.

C: Okay because see, in 1926, I think, one of the members of the board of education made a speech that said that Rayen students and faculty, everybody associated with Rayen, had sort of like a superiority complex, which they didn't like and they wanted to try and bring Rayen

down to the level of the other high schools. Do you think that was a valid statement on his part? Was there this feeling of superiority at Rayen?

P: I would put it this way. That people outside of Rayen thought that we had a superiority complex, not that we actually did, but . . . Of course, well, in a sense, we did think that we were better than other schools.

C: Right. So you felt it was justified.

P: Which I think we were on account of the preference and deference that was given to us by our students who went outside of the town or outside of the state and applied for entrance to different colleges. Immediately they were recognized and no exams, nothing. They could go right in. So it's only natural that you would feel a pride in Rayen School.

C: Could you sort of like describe a typical day, a typical school day for you in 1927 or 1928?

P: For starters, I went to a meeting. Well, yes, I can. I would get there about 8:15 or 8:00 in the morning. Sometimes students would be in and different committee people would be in. Talk about what they were going to do on their special committees. Members of the golf team might be in to see who were going to play or if it were football, I'd be talking to some of the football players, if it was football season. And then, at 8:30, classes began. No, at 9:00, classes began. We had a homeroom period between 8:30 and 9:00. That's when the students were tardy, after 8:30. And then, classes would begin. I usually had four or five classes, but when I had the golf team, I didn't have as many. And I would have classes the first three periods and the fourth period, I would have a study hall in Room 206, a big study hall.

Then lunch. And I'd come back and have my two classes. Then, after I had the golf team, I had the eighth period off and go out and we'd have our matches at the Stambaugh or wherever, out of town, wherever that would be. And if it were football season, I'd go down to the scrub team and give them the plays that I'd worked out for Saturday's scouting. And John Ross would be there. He'd run through the playoff our opponents for the coming Saturday. And that constituted a typical day at Rayen.

C: Now, since you taught there from 1927 to 1961, there was sort of like a lot of things happening during that time. For example, right after you started, the Depression probably hit, a year or two after you started. What effect did this have on the school and on you, when you were teaching there?

P: Well, I'll tell you. We had to play it pretty close in the Depression because we didn't make much money and we didn't get paid for quite awhile. I would say. . . Close to a year that we didn't get any pay.

C: None at all?

P: None at all. We had to go on the top at that time and play everything pretty close.

C: Well, how did most of the teachers get along if their pay was cut off at that time?

P: They had to charge things, I suppose, just like we did. And pay for them later. Yes, credit.

C: Were the stores more apt to honor the credits say of a person who taught at the Rayen School than say opposed to a person who just started working in the mills or something like that?

P: Yes, they would extend credit to teachers.

C: And so it would be fairly easy for you.

P: Yes. Not too bad.

C: What did it do to the enrollment of the school, the Depression? Did you notice a drop?

P: I would say that it didn't have much effect on the number of the students, as far as I can remember.

C: That's sort of strange because how did the school say the tuition during the Depression? Did they still collect it regularly or did they sort of give credit for that too?

P: I suppose they gave credit. I don't know. I'm not sure. The school board took over. That's right.

C: That would have been about what year? About 1918. That would have been around there or would it have been?

before that?

P: I'm not certain.

C: For example, when Roosevelt came in to office, did you notice any changes there at Rayen, the impact of Roosevelt and say, his whole program and the New Deal? Or did it just sort of stay along the same lines?

P: I think it was about the same. I don't recall any difference.

C: Do you know specifically why you didn't receive your salary for a year? I mean, did they explain to you where all the money was going and where it wasn't coming from? Was there any complaints from the faculty as far as money?

P: I don't know.

C: But you sort of accepted it?

P: Yes. I think that we accepted it as being natural owing to the times.

C: This cut off in pay, that was felt throughout the whole city, right, as far as all the schools.

P: Yes. That was universal in Youngstown.

C: What about the people you worked with, you know, the other members of the faculty? What was your relationship with them?

P: We had a good relationship with them. They had a faculty wives club and they had meetings. There seemed to be a good relationship.

C: And what about with the administrators of the school? Same thing?

P: Yes. The principal, Mr. Miller, when I went up there, and Mr. Herr, Mr. Tier, Mr. Lindsay, and all of them were very well liked and respected. Teachers liked them very much. Of course, in any faculty there were a few dissenters, but as a rule, they were very well thought of.

C: About what was the size of the faculty when you started there?

- P: I think sixty-five, around sixty-five. We had a very high enrollment in 1927 and 1928.
- C: Were those mostly men teachers?
- P: Mostly women teachers in 1927.
- C: How would you say the subjects were distributed? Like, for example, women would be apt to teach what subjects and men would be apt to teach what subjects in 1927?
- P: Well, they would teach English and Latin and German, French, and the languages. And the men would usually teach the math and American history. Mr. Miller always wanted men to teach American history. I don't know why, but that was one of his quirks. And it was some time before any woman taught American history.
- C: So Mr. Miller, he was a pretty strong sort of principal?
- P: Very, very strong man. And a good disciplinarian. And he was well thought of and respected by the students as well as the faculty. The faculty, more or less, didn't want to cross him. They feared him and I found him very likable and I was always close to him in the sense because I had helped his grandson, so I never feared him. But he was, generally, respected and feared.
- C: Who took over after Mr. Miller?
- P: Mr. Herr. Frank Herr.
- C: How long did he stay there? Do you have any idea?
- P: About four or five years.
- C: Did you notice a change when he took over?
- P: No. Not so much, no, I don't think so.
- C: Would you consider him along the same lines as Mr. Miller, in the same mold?
- P: Yes, I would.
- C: Was there any principals during your stay who sort of changed the office as opposed to Mr. Miller and Mr. Herr?
- P: No, I think it was pretty well inherited and handed down

the same ideas all through the principals under whom I worked.

C: And so it was handed down that way. Now, in the 1950's, there was sort of like a change you said between the faculty and the students. There was a close relationship. How did the principal react to this, like, obviously, it was going to have an effect on some of the discipline? Do you remember who the principal was say in the late 1950's?

P: No, I can't say after I left.

C: Who were some of the people on the faculty, you know, during your stay there? Like, who was there, for example, when you first started? People who you sort of you know, had to take to look for sort of, well, we'll say guidance, but since you're a new teacher coming into a school?

P: Well, down on my floor, there was Miss Smith taught Latin. Miss Roth taught some English classes and one civics class. Miss Barger who taught world history and ancient history. And Mr. Stewart, John Struthers Stewart, who taught American history. Mr. Walter Mayer, Dr. Mayer now, who taught American history. And there was Coach Matson and Coach Bevin.

C: Are any of these people, besides Mr. Mayer. . .

P: Miss Boynton, Miss Morrison, they were English teachers.

C: Okay. These people were there when you first started.

P: They were there when I came. And Gillespie, Mr. Gillespie, who taught chemistry.

C: Which ones of these you just named are still living that you know of at this time? I know Miss Boynton is.

P: Miss Boynton. I don't know about the others.

C: Dr. Mayer, is he still. . .?

P: Dr. Mayor, right. As far as we know.

C: Is there anything like you would just like to say, you know, your experiences at Rayen, just to sort of like generally capsulize it, talk about it, what you liked, what you didn't like?

P: Yes. I had a wonderful experience at Rayen. I enjoyed teaching there and I remember the students with affection. I liked them very much. They were always respectful and kind and we used to chaperone a lot of dances there. Almost all the dances that they had during that period were chaperoned by us.

There was a real friendly spirit from students to teachers and among the teachers that I have to remember with a great deal of pleasure.

C: It is interesting to point out that you know, this idea. There was respect yet there was friendship. Somewhere along the lines, the two were merged, well, not merged, but respect was lost in the friendship.

P: I think that's true from what I've heard. But not while I was there. I thought that I could see it sort of coming on in 1961. It may seem I've been partial. I don't think so, though. I don't think that we did because I had three more years and I could have taught, but in the meantime, I had a job at the post office. I worked after school.

C: When did you start that job?

P: I had that for thirty years. And I kept my job at the post office and retired from teaching when I was sixty-seven, so I had three more years of teaching if I wanted to, but I found that it was a little too much at that time.

C: So you worked at the post office since approximately 1931.

P: (Teachers) They were expected to do two jobs. Through it all, I would say that they were glad to make the extra money. Only fair and in the summer I would do different jobs, of course.

C: Did most of the teachers at Rayen take second jobs?

P: I would think so. I don't know though.

C: At least most of the men teachers?

P: I would say that most of them did take extra work. They would work in stores or somewhere. I know before I went to the post office, I worked as a cop up in the mill. And I had worked in a store, in Hartzell's.

Things like that. And I taught a little night school to make extra money. Of course, salaries were very meager at that time. The most I ever made was \$7,000 a year. That was when I retired. The top salary was \$7,000.

C: That was in 1961.

P: 1961.

C: What were the, what I want to know this is very personal, but what made you remain at Rayen, at the Rayen School? What made you remain a teacher when the salaries were you know, not that great, yet you stayed on for so many years?

P: Well, I think I wasn't educated for anything else and I liked teaching. I liked teaching the people, the young people. And it just seemed only natural to continue. I don't know what else I could have done except these odd jobs that I got after school.

C: Do you think you would have stayed on as long as if you worked at the Rayen School? For example, say if you were at East, would you think you would have stayed on teaching as long or not?

P: I don't know. But I think that I probably would. I thought that if I had to get another job to help support my family. I think that I would have.

C: Do you notice like obviously, you know, even though you feel that that's all you were qualified to do, there's got to be a definite dedication there. Did you notice this dedication in most of the teachers that were at Rayen?

P: Yes, I think so. In most of them.

C: And you noticed that all through your career, that same dedication?

P: I would say so. I would think that they were highly dedicated.

P: I got up every morning, I was glad to go to school and teach.

Yes. I was on the tennis team for three years down there. And I was runner-up for state in tennis, collegiate. In high school, I played basketball and

baseball. And high jump and on the track team.

C: Where did you say you went to high school at again?

P: In Athens High School, I played baseball and basketball. Got letters in them. And in track and in the high jump. But when I went to college and the only sport I took up was tennis. And I said I belonged to the National Guard. We did flood duty over Marietta. We rode into the second story buildings there and we rolled out clothing and food for the natives and that was quite an experience, too. At the time, I was I think about eighteen or nineteen years old. And that was really one of the things that stood out in my early life. And of course, that was the only time I belonged to the National Guard, of which I was the first line sergeant. When we went up to Camp Sheridan, in Alabama, our regiment was broken up and some went to machine guns companies, some to infantry, and quite a few of us went to field artillery, Battery A, 136 field artillery, where we stayed in Alabama for around ten or eleven months. And we went to France for ten months. We were in France ten months, training there about five fellows from Bordeaux, France. And we were all over France. We were in the northern part and our outfit was decorated by the French. And we fired up to the armistice, fired there. Fired barrage for off and on seventy-two hours before the armistice. Then we stopped. And that was it as far as the war was concerned.

We had these tests, you know, sort of like an IQ test in the regiment. And a friend of mine and myself were the top ones in the divisions. So we figured we'll go on to Oxford. And they asked us if we wanted to go and we said, "Hell no, we want to go home." And so we went home.

C: This going to Oxford, was this going to be paid for by you?

P: Yes. This was free after the armistice.

C: Something was offered to you know, just about everybody?

P: Like the Army of Occupation and you could get a free scholarship to Oxford. That's supposed to be some kind of deal that the English wanted to put through because we helped them out.

C: Did you turn it down just because you wanted to go home?

P: Yes, I wanted to go home. That's right.

C: This would sort of be like post-graduate work?

P: Yes. Student.

C: Anything else you want to say?

P: That's about all there was to the war. I did go home. We got this job in Akron that I told you about.

C: What have you been doing since your retirement from the Rayen School?

P: Oh, play golf in the summer and shoot a little pool. Those are my recreations. That's all. A year or so ago and I had this operation in the hospital. Had two majors in a week. So it did me in and so I'm getting better, but I can't do very much.

Oh yes, we went to Cuba. We've been to Florida several times. We've travelled some in Quebec. We've been in Quebec three times.

We had a good life. Very good.

C: You've been keeping abreast of what's happening at Rayen anymore?

P: No, I'm sorry to say that I don't. I haven't been able to go to the games this year. And it's too bad because they have a better team. I think they've only lost one game.

C: Right. They play for the championship Friday.

P: That was East Liverpool. I don't know about Chaney. Chaney may take it. I'm a little leery of that. I'd love to go and watch it.

C: Okay. Well, thank you very much Mr. Pickering.

P: Oh. You're welcome. I've enjoyed being with you and having you here.

END OF INTERVIEW